dissected by Smith: 'It is by ['sympathy'] that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost anything which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected ...' Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, [1756], *Works of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, 6 vols, London, 1854–6, I: 79. Many of these assertions in behalf of sympathy were of course in answer to Mandeville's (and behind him, Hobbes's) reduction of sympathy to self-interest; *The Fable of the Bees: Or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F.B. Kaye, 2 vols, Oxford, 1924, I: 66.

109. It should be added that there are other usages of 'sympathy' in Gregory's work, especially a medical one which also seems to have interested Smith, and which is in need of scholarly investigation. See e.g. *Comparative View*, pp. 70–1. This issue will be taken up in the chapter on Rush below.
110. Gregory, *ibid.*, pp. 63–4.
111. Gregory, *Lectures*, pp. 65–6.
112. Gregory, *Comparative View*, pp. 67–8.
113. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 57.
114. Gregory, *Legacy*, p. 31.
115. Gregory, *Comparative View*, p. 53.
116. Gregory, *Lectures*, p. 19.
117. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 9.
118. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 21.
119. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 25.
120. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 14.
121. Gregory, *ibid.*, pp. 23–4.
122. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 27.
123. Gregory, *ibid.*, pp. 28–29, 237–8.
124. Alan Saunders, *Be Candid where you Can.*
125. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 4 vols, Edinburgh, 1788, Vol. I, p. 314.
126. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 86.
127. Gregory, *Lectures*, pp. 33–4.
128. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 33.
129. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 54.
130. Gregory, *ibid.*, pp. 58–9.
131. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, pp. 114–15.
132. Gregory, *Lectures*, pp. 35–6; Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, p. 606. The quotations in the following paragraph are from Gregory, *ibid.*
133. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 36.
134. Gregory, *ibid.*, 39–40.
135. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 41.



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136. Gregory, *ibid.*, pp. 42–3.
137. Gregory, *ibid.*, pp. 49–50.
138. Gregory,*ibid.*, p. 107, Comparative View, p. 156.
139. Gregory, *Comparative View,* pp. 195–6 and 186–7 .
140. Gregory, *Lectures,* pp. 68–9.
141. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 34.
142. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 62.
143. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 34.
144. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 62.
145. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 62.
146. Gregory, *Comparative View,* p. 172.
147. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 172.
148. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 173.
149. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 203.
150. Gregory, *ibid.*, p. 172.
151. Gregory, *Lectures,* p. 24.
152. Cf. Sissela Bok, *Lying,* New York, 1979, p. 65.



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# 3

# Thomas Percival: The Duty of Public Office

## Character and Context

### *Dissenting Background*

Thomas Percival was born in 1740 in Warrington. His father, Joseph, was an educated merchant, and both his paternal grandfather and uncle were physicians known locally for their literary accomplishments. Orphaned in infancy and raised by his eldest sister, he received his early education at a private seminary and the free grammar school of Warrington where he was, by all accounts, a diligent though sickly student with an aptitude for classical and theological studies.[1]

According to Percival's son and biographer, Edward Percival MD, his father's choice of a profession was greatly influenced by his uncle, Thomas Percival MD, 'whom he regarded with singular veneration' and whose 'genius and learning presented to his imagination, every attainment suited to the ambition of his future life'. When he was ten years old his uncle died, leaving him the patrimonial fortune and the means thereby to pursue a liberal education. Percival also inherited an extensive library which, according to his son, 'opened to him the invaluable privilege of a familiar access to books from the commencement of his earliest studies'.[2] In 1757 Percival was the first student enrolled at the newly opened Warrington Academy headed by the Rev. John Seddon. In his earlier capacity as Percival's private tutor, Seddon had introduced his pupil to the study of moral philosophy and theology and the pupil's foster mother, the pious Elizabeth Percival, to the tenets of Rational Dissent.[3] Soon after Seddon's arrival in Warrington, the Percival family left the Church of England to join his Unitarian congregation.[4]



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To leave the church 'by law established' and to count oneself a Dissenter was, at the time of the Percival family's conversion, a political act of some consequence. Protestant Dissenters, like Catholics and Jews, were frequently viewed as a foreign group in the nation. Like all religious minorities, they were denied what we would describe as political rights. They could not by law hold public office, sit on a jury, or stand for parliament. To the extent that their religious views were deemed heretical they were also denied freedom of worship. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 restricted the intellectual life and career opportunities of all Dissenters for almost two centuries. The evolution of separate schools such as Warrington Academy was the consequence of the Act of Uniformity (1662) and the Five Mile Act (1665) which required all schoolmasters to declare their adherence, on penalty of a fine, to the articles of the established Church.[5] Furthermore, Dissenters were forbidden to matriculate at Oxford, and Cambridge University required subscription for taking a degree.

Although the repressive laws against Dissenters were not consistently enforced in the eighteenth century, the laws themselves remained on the statute books. Because of the uncertain status of Dissenters they were vulnerable to petty abuse from local authorities, and those who openly espoused Unitarian ideas were even denied the protection offered to other Nonconformists under the Toleration Act of 1689.[6] In 1796, the Dissenting Deputies published a report documenting cases of abuse against the property and persons of Dissenters. The offences included the refusal to marry or bury Dissenting Church members (who were forbidden by law to perform their own rites in their own churches) and attempts to prosecute ministers and schoolmasters for running Dissenting seminaries and academies. After the French Revolution there was an increase in cases of riot, disturbance and arson aimed against Dissenters. A tragic victim of persecution in this period was one of the century's best-known scientists and one of Warrington's most famous teachers – Joseph Priestley, whose chapel, home and scientific laboratory were destroyed in 1791 by Church-and-King mobs in Birmingham, inflamed by the local Anglican clergymen.

At the time when Percival's family joined them, the Unitarians had become a settled and affluent group with considerable political power at the local and regional level. Social historians refer to the 'Unitarian Establishment' of towns such as Warrington and Manchester, and with the expansion of the economy in these places the older Dissenting families built lavish chapels which exemplified their rising status and wealth.[7]



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It would appear that what has sometimes been described as 'marginality' for such Dissenters as Percival and his circle can be viewed more positively as a condition consisting in a combination of geographical and social factors, which 'allows new men to take advantage of new opportunities'.[8] Manchester, Percival's home and place of practice, became in his lifetime the first modern industrial city of Europe and its energetic Unitarian community was comprised of men and women who were among the first to experience the industrial revolution, to share in its prosperity and to recognize and attempt to alleviate the appalling suffering that followed in its wake. Many of the 'new men' were associated with Dissenting academies like Warrington; the philosophy which shaped them and which they in turn so vigorously promoted, played an important role in British and North American intellectual life and society. Percival was one of these men and his medical ethics was, I shall argue, written from the viewpoint of a gentleman Dissenter.

### *Warrington Academy*

In order to understand what this implies, it is helpful to locate Percival's ideas in the specific context of Warrington Academy and the circle of students and the tutors associated with the institution which shared with Edinburgh the epithet 'Athens of the North'. Percival's *alma mater* was one of a long line of Dissenting academies which flourished and declined throughout the century. Its constitution, character, aims and curriculum were, however, as different from its predecessors as from the English universities with which it was often and, in general, favourably contrasted.[9] Warrington Academy is not, of course, the only source that can be given for Thomas Percival's moral-philosophical views. Like so many other medical men of his age, he was educated at the universities of Edinburgh and Leyden and, like them, he travelled on the Continent, in France and Germany, and spent some time establishing connections in London – a typical career path for an eighteenth-century provincial physician. Thus each stage of his medical education provides us with a wider and richer context in which to situate his ideas. Nevertheless, his life-long association with the Academy, first as a student and then as a trustee, active supporter and promoter, suggests a strong continuing identification and sympathy with its aspirations and ideals. For this reason I have chosen to examine what I take to be the most important and original features of Percival's medical ethics against the intellectual background of Warrington Academy.



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Warrington Academy was said to have been 'the earliest and most important institutional style academy in England'. Earlier academies had been either private ventures centred on a single tutor or group of teachers, or of the type founded and supported and consequently controlled by outside funds. It had its own trustees, subscribers and board of managers and, because it was unendowed, it remained free of interference from church organizations. Unlike many other academies it was not a purely local establishment and, while it had Warrington supporters, much of its financial aid and many of its students came from elsewhere. It was one of the most ecumenical of the Dissenting academies, open to students of every denomination from all parts of the British Isles, the West Indies and the American Colonies. The student body included sons of titled persons, commercial magnates, professional men, tradesmen and the sons of impecunious Anglican as well as Dissenting clergy.[10]

Warrington's independence and theological and philosophical pluralism reflected the social aspirations of its supporters as well as the fundamental ideals of the Dissenting cause itself, the most important of which was a view of civil liberty which had as its cornerstone the natural right of every man to freedom of religion and education. The parents of Warrington students sought a useful modern education for their sons, which would prepare them for careers in commerce and industry as well as for the liberal professions, predominantly the church. It was commonly held by Dissenting pedagogues that the English universities were little more than factories for the production of young rakes, and that an institution such as Warrington afforded 'fewer opportunities of incurring habits unfavourable to their morals or improvement'.[11] From its inception Warrington set itself up as an alternative 'university', with different goals, pedagogy, staff, and students from the English universities. In his appeal to would-be subscribers Percival's teacher John Seddon characterized the new academy as:

> well calculated for those that are to be engaged in a Commercial Life, as well as the Learned Professions to give them some knowledge of the more Useful Branches of Literature; and to lead them to an early Acquaintance with, and just concern for, the true Principles of Religion and Liberty, of which great interests they must in future life be Supporters.[12]

There is certainly no mistaking the scorn with which Dissenters viewed the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge. Joseph Priestley, for example, compared the English universities to 'pools of stagnant



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water, secured by dams and mounds and offensive to the neighbourhood', while the Dissenting academies were more like 'rivers which, taking their natural course fertilize a whole country'.[13] Warrington offered what Percival described as 'general improvement for the sons of commercial men'. For the benefit of those who wished to follow in their fathers' footsteps, the normal five years of study were shortened to three years and the regular liberal arts curriculum broadened to include those 'useful and manly studies preparatory to commercial life'.[14] But as Gregory Claeys points out in his study of commerce teaching at the academies, 'the ideal of Dissenting education was never to create a merely mercantile middle class unable to contemplate higher moral ends'.[15] Along with the political economy and social thought of Scottish thinkers such as Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, commerce students received an education in the ethics of business or, as one tutor, William Enfield, described his own course, 'Social Duties of the Commercial Kind'.[16] Business ethics at Warrington and other Dissenting academies could be described in much the same manner as Percival described his medical ethics – as a study 'designed to comprehend ... the discipline and moral polity of individuals acting in a specific capacity'.[17] Like medical ethics or the prescriptions of conduct books for women's domestic and social relations, business ethics was 'just one part of the great scheme of social morality', systematized by academic moral philosophy by means of categories derived from the natural-law tradition that was central to much of eighteenth-century higher education.[18]

One of the chief Dissenting ideals was to promote variety in the pursuit of knowledge. The students' mental faculties would be trained by 'multiplying and diversifying [the mind's] activities'.[19] It was held that all branches of knowledge were mutually connected and interdependent and that the great task of science was to understand these connections. As Bacon and the Royal Society had taught, this could never be the work of one man but must necessarily be that of many different minds through many generations. There is also in the literature of Dissenting educators a view (shared by Gregory) of the word 'professional' as having distinctly negative connotations. On this view, to be professional was to be merely proficient. A professional man lacking a classical or 'liberal' education was thus denoted a 'mere mechanic'. A Dissenting liberal education should ideally foster a philosophical and not a merely professional spirit. John Aikin Jr, the famous son of a Warrington tutor, referred to such a plan of general education as the



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'copious scheme of early instruction' which would develop the qualities of mind necessary for 'the unshackled plan of life'. Critics of Dissenting education viewed this as one more likely to create 'smatterers in everything than proficients in anything', but Warrington's tutors defended the broad curriculum as the best means of creating a solid foundation for a life-time of learning.[20]

Like the Scottish philosophy of education, Dissenting pedagogy was also based on the Lockean premise that every man had a right to religious liberty or freedom of conscience. This right, along with the natural right of educating oneself, fell under the head of 'Civil liberty' which Joseph Priestley described as 'that power over their actions which members of a state reserve to themselves and which their officers must not infringe'.[21] The right of a parent to choose his child's education was taken to be outside the purview of the state and the education of children a divine trust put directly into the hands of parents for the promotion of both individual self-interest and the common good. As it was for the Scots, education was a social and communal but not a political matter, though it had important political implications. It was designed to develop useful social individuals who were, as Percival noted, 'fitted to exercise and improve the general scale of human intellect'.[22]

The educational ideals of rational Dissent, and of Warrington in particular, had many similarities with the Scottish pedagogical views previously outlined. Not only did the two groups have theological affinities and a common philosophical background in Bacon and Locke, the natural lawyers and others, but there was a direct and very important Scottish influence on Dissent. As we shall see in more detail later, this was particularly the case with Warrington education. Most of the Warrington tutors, including all of Percival's teachers, received part of their training at Scottish universities, which at the time boasted some of Britain's foremost philosophers. While the philosophical and theological ideas of such notable teachers as George Turnbull, Francis Hutcheson, William Leechman and Adam Smith[23] substantially influenced the curriculum at Warrington and helped to shape the moral views of a new generation of Dissenting intellectuals, it should be noted that this exchange of ideas was reciprocal. As Martin Fitzpatrick has shown, English Dissent also played a significant role in shaping Scottish religious and intellectual ideas.[24]

The principles of free inquiry, the hallmark of Dissenting education, were formally instituted at Warrington by its first master, John Taylor, who wrote in the preface to his course on biblical criticism that it was the students' task:



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> to attend to evidence as it lies in the holy scriptures, or in the nature of things and the dictates of reason, to assent to nothing taught by him [the teacher] except as it appeared to be supported by him and justified by proper evidence; to suspect or reject any principle or sentiment advanced by him which afterwards upon careful examination should appear doubtful or false; and finally to keep their minds always open to fresh truth, to banish prejudice, and steadily to assert and fully allow to others the inalienable right of judgment and conscience.[25]

In the same vein, John Prior Estlin, another Warrington alumnus and student of John Aikin, advised students to be careful to form their own opinions, so that their minds, 'like some noble buildings could be richly furnished with original paintings and not mere copies'.[26] Not surprisingly Dissenting academies like Warrington bred some of the great controversialists of the time as well as those whose literary output was, like Percival's, highly praised for its urbanity and candour.[27]

### *The Ideal of Candour*[28]

Because the word candour appears so often in the moral literary works of the late eighteenth century it is tempting to dismiss it as a buzzword – another convenient expression of approbation like the terms humanity, benevolence and honour. Candour was, nevertheless, like these concepts, central to Percival's ethics and, like them, it was dissected and distinguished from false varieties by him and other Dissenting moralists.

John Aikin Jr. typically described the virtue of candour as a disposition of character which was the opposite of bigotry or prejudice. To be candid, in his view, was to be habitually disposed 'to form fair and impartial judgements on opinions and actions'. In much the same way that Percival warned about the corruption of sympathy, Aikin explained that true candour should never be confused with charity or be viewed as a form of universal indulgence. It did not consist of giving equal credit to each person's explanation of his or her motives or ideas. According to Aikin we should impute to others only what 'the rules of just inference warrant'. Candour could, however, be promoted by emphasizing one's opponent's virtues. We should, in other words, love the sinner not the sin.[29]

Aikin suggested that while, in the case of controversy, each person must respect the right of the other to freedom of inquiry, one's right to such respect was not derived from either existing or



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past authority. Respect was not owed to one's opponent as a matter of law but as one of morals. It was what the natural lawyers called an imperfect right; a right which could be claimed only 'by superior talents and virtues, by disinterestedness and liberality'.[30]

It will not be possible to trace the myriad uses of the concept of candour in Dissenting thought but it is important to emphasize its central function in Percival's *Medical Ethics.* In his study of Richard Price (another close friend of Percival's), D.O. Thomas has forcefully established the wider implications of this idea. In his account, candour involved not only what Aikin described as the disposition to judge fairly, it was also a 'claim that all beliefs should be subject to rational criticism', that, 'in principle, truth can be discovered and communicated' and that an 'appeal to reason is the only legitimate form of persuasion'. True candour also implied an attitude of patience, modesty, dispassion and humbleness in the search for truth and not least 'a sense of the equality of rational agents and a sense of community in the search for knowledge'.[31]

Thomas' analyses of the use of this concept in Price's philosophy is a useful point of departure for an examination of Percival's ethics. This was an ideal he and many other Dissenting thinkers shared with Price and the standard by which their own intellectual activities would be judged. It was, in any case, on this understanding that candour as a personal virtue was also an important social duty constitutive of polite society and polite science. Indeed, for Percival the concept of candour epitomized those qualities of mind which would best help to realize Gregory's dream of 'laying open' medicine.

Interested spectators of the religious controversies of the day, the students of Warrington had impressed upon them the value of 'true' candour. At the same time they also witnessed the fragile nature of those alliances of interest that form such an institution. Apart from its innovative curriculum, Warrington might have offered an exemplary introduction to the problems faced by any institution whose existence depended upon an efficient mechanism for curtailing and mediating internecine rivalry. It is perhaps not surprising that Percival, a graduate of England's first institutional-style academy, should also be the author of a modern code of professional ethics of which a central feature was an innovative guideline for the mediation of disputes among the various orders of medical men in charity hospitals and medical dispensaries. This was an institutional development which he and several of his fellow students extended well beyond the hospital walls, for many became



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founders and organizers of a variety of local institutions, some of which exist to this day. In a new and significant sense of the word, they, and Percival in particular, were quintessentially 'institutional men'.

The general character and aims of Warrington Academy provide us with an appropriate framework for interpreting some of the most important aspects of Percival's medical ethics. In addition, it will be helpful to examine very briefly the attempt by several Warrington tutors to create a curriculum later described as 'the logical development of Dissenting educational theory and practice'.[32]

*A New Curriculum*

During Percival's student years at Warrington (1757–61) there were three tutors in residence: John Taylor (1694–1761), John Holt (1704–72) and John Aikin (1713–80). All were graduates of Scottish Universities, accomplished scholars and experienced schoolmasters, but it was Taylor and Aikin who had the most influence on Percival's work. John Taylor, the first rector of Warrington and tutor in Divinity, was a well-known Hebraic scholar whose classical knowledge was reputed to be unrivalled.[33] He taught classes in Hebrew, classical languages and moral philosophy, and apart from his many theological works, he wrote two tracts on moral philosophy to be used as guides for his students. Significantly, Taylor's moral philosophy, like his theology, was at odds with Percival's first teacher, John Seddon's. Although both were graduates of Glasgow University, Taylor took a critical view of Francis Hutcheson's scheme of moral philosophy while Seddon, it appears, remained a faithful disciple. In a student guide titled *An Examination of the Scheme of Morality Advanced by Dr Hutcheson,* Taylor argued that while Hutcheson's intentions in putting forward his theory of a distinct moral sense were admirable,

> To make the chief excellency of our nature consist in mechanical instincts, is like making the beauty and activity of the human body to consist in the use of crutches. Crutches assist the motion of a weak, or crippled body; but are crutches therefore the proper principle of bodily motion?[34]

According to Taylor, the real guide to virtue is reason, or 'the understanding' of 'the relations of things', not, as he put it, Hutcheson's sympathy or 'blind, unintelligent instincts'. Percival's tutor John Seddon, on the other hand, defended Hutcheson's moral sense theory. Through this continuation of the debate about the



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foundations of morals, Percival received an introduction to moral philosophy similar to that given in Edinburgh and Glasgow. It was, however, a position closer to Taylor's that Percival would eventually adopt.

It is important to stress that, while the philosophical foundation issue continues to attract most interest from modern philosophical ethicists, it constituted only one part of eighteenth-century moral philosophy. As we have noted above, the theoretical part was, strictly speaking, distinct from and 'subservient to the practical part of this science', as Thomas Reid explained to his Glasgow students a few years after Percival's student days in Warrington.[35] Theories of the moral faculty were seen as highly abstract, infinitely disputed and generally as having little influence on moral practice. The specification of the duties in life or the rules of virtuous conduct, on the other hand, was an eminently practical discipline. Only when theoretical or speculative systems denied the very existence of a moral faculty did they have practical implications. Both in dissenting academies and in Scottish universities the theoretical part of moral philosophy was designed to refute such 'licentious' systems as those of Hobbes, Mandeville and Hume, though even in this regard the ideal of free inquiry assured such philosophers a wide student audience – at least as titillating moral bogeymen.

The distinction between the theory of the moral faculties and the explanation of the duties in life is of great importance in the present work because the medical ethics which is the main concern here, falls squarely within the latter field. Its importance can be further explained through its connection with a parallel distinction in theology. Many clergymen of the Enlightenment – Scots Presbyterian, Dissenting, and latitudinarian Anglican – argued for the relative simplicity of natural theology compared with the complicated systems of theologians. Just as the arguments of metaphysicians were far too subtle to become the foundation for a system of practical duties, so theology was far too complex and abstract to be used as a guide for religious belief. While the complexity in both cases might invite reference to authority, the controversiality that goes with complexity should, it was argued, rule out the entrenchment of authority, whether priestly, political or educational, in these areas of life. Each of us must form his or her own opinion concerning matters of faith, just as each person must reach a personal conclusion concerning right and wrong. Candour, as Price and Priestley taught, required no less.

While anti-authoritarian and in a sense individualistic, this line



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of thought was decidedly not anti-social. We are, in this view, at least equal both in our being individual and in the inescapability of our having to live together with each other's differences.

Just as the natural religious sense, uncontaminated by speculative theology, may give each person an adequate idea of his or her relationship with the Creator, so practical ethics as understood by any moral faculty – whatever its metaphysical status – sufficed to show us the duty of our social station. It is the knowledge of these duties that both the followers and antagonists of Hutcheson's system could agree upon and this was the primary lesson taught in the classes of both Seddon and Taylor.

John Aikin Sr, the other tutor to influence Percival at Warrington, was educated at Northampton Academy and at Gregory's *alma mater* King's College, Aberdeen, and he was, not surprisingly, a life-long friend of Thomas Reid.[36] After graduating from King's, he returned to Northampton to become assistant tutor to Philip Doddridge, one of the leading figures in the history of Dissenting education. During Percival's time in Warrington, Aikin was tutor in languages and *belles lettres*. He taught classes in French, grammar, oratory and criticism, logic and history. He also encouraged wide reading in his students, who became well versed in the Greek classics, and it was said that 'in reading the philosophical treatises of the ancients', Aikin 'enlarged so much as to render his lectures almost a second course, in a varied form, of natural religion and ethics'.[37]

Percival was Aikin's first pupil and if we are to judge Aikin's contribution by the character and style of his pupil's works, then he was indeed the most influential of Percival's teachers. An important example of this is Percival's original choice of *Medical Jurisprudence* [38] as the title of the work which later, on the advice of colleagues and friends, became *Medical Ethics*. In his preface, however, Percival defended his first choice. Some modern critics find both titles inappropriate, but this is a misjudgement, since Percival and his contemporaries defined their professional ethics in terms derived from a particular jurisprudential tradition, as we will see. For the moment, it should simply be noted that like his Scottish teachers, Aikin had an extensive acquaintance with natural jurisprudence and like them he lectured on the subject 'so far as it is derived from the same sources with the doctrines of Natural Religion and Private Morality'.[39] Indeed, as we have seen, these three doctrines, natural religion, private morality, and natural jurisprudence, made up practical ethics. They covered, respectively, man's duty to God, to



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himself and to others. Because professional ethics fell under the last category, 'duty to others', it was appropriate to designate it as a 'particular jurisprudence', namely, medical jurisprudence.

If the broad sweep of the Warrington curriculum reflected the variety of interests pursued by tutors such as John Aikin, it was to the influence of another polymath, Joseph Priestley, that it owed its contemporary reputation as the most scientific and innovative of the academies. Priestley later achieved a reputation as one of Britain's leading scientists, and many Warrington students maintained their ties with him. Like Percival, many were participants in and financial supporters of Priestley's various scientific schemes and, like Percival, they shared neither Priestley's theological views nor his radical politics.

Priestley began his career at Warrington as tutor in languages and *belles lettres*, and although he is chiefly remembered for his scientific and philosophic work, historians of British education have not overlooked his contribution to such areas of the humanities as English grammar and history. The new emphasis placed on the subject of history as an academic subject,[40] and the particular view which was taught at Warrington, indirectly, or so I shall argue, influenced the writing of professional ethics. Priestley's course is therefore also of interest in the present context.

One of Priestley's best-known works and the one which established his reputation as a natural scientist was his *History and Present State of Electricity*, written at Warrington and published in 1767. In the following years, however, he also developed a course of lectures on history for students at the Dissenting academies. These were later recommended at Cambridge and were, according to one contemporary critic, among 'the most able and useful works produced by its author; and indeed among the best and most satisfactory views of that subject which the age furnished'.[41] At Warrington, Priestley also gave a course on the sources, methods, and objects of history, and he had the Warrington Academy Press publish chronological and biographical charts which he adapted from the French for use by British students. This was considered a brilliant achievement for which he received a fellowship of the Royal Society.[42]

History and biography were intimately connected, as we shall see, and their common object was the study of human nature. The application of history and biography was the task of philosophers who alone 'faithfully, impartially, and upon an extensive scale' could make use of the material offered by these disciplines. The purpose of



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historical biography was thus not to confirm *a priori* moral or religious principles, but to provide the data for 'a calm and laborious investigation'.[43] This was, in the view of its practitioners, the Baconian ideal of scientific history and biography.

According to Priestley, the study of history had three functions which were, in ascending importance, 'to amuse the imagination' and 'interest the passions in general', to 'improve the understanding' and to 'strengthen the sentiments of virtue'.[44] The last indicates that the new 'scientific' history with its emphasis on causal analysis was meant to retain its traditional didactic role as exemplary literature. 'To men of all stations instructions for their conduct may be conveyed in the clearest most cogent manner through the example of others.'[45] He also believed that the study of history, in addition to being a cornerstone in common education, was essential in the formation of the character of statesmen and public officials.

There was nothing new in the intertwining of history and biography but, when put to the service of the Dissenting cause (and to the service of other Enlightenment causes elsewhere), it transformed the genre of biography. The 'new' biography should, as Priestley put it, comprise a 'tablet of merit' rather than a 'tablet of fame'. The underlying theme was the ideal of social ascent through talent and education, and it was enthusiastically embraced by the liberal anti-establishment. Because it was the lives of ordinary men (and occasionally women)[46] that were celebrated in this manner, the genre was, in effect, both a means for and a reflection of the changing self-image of intellectual and professional groups striving for public recognition.

The tone of the new biography is clearly conveyed in a programmatic statement by one of its best-known proponents, the younger Aikin:

> those characters in biography are most instructive and animating, in which we see persevering efforts overcoming a crowd of obstacles, and distinguished eminence rising out of moderate beginnings. This is, in fact, the discipline through which some of the greatest names among mankind have passed; and it may be asserted, that none of the original favourites of nature and fortune have attained a superiority so solid and durable, as that acquired by such a course of probation.[47]

Priestley and other Dissenters helped to collect and disseminate the biographical data which served as the basis for an extraordinary number of popular 'lives', eulogies, tributary records, funeral orations, memoirs and epitaphs which celebrated the literary and



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scientific achievements of his group. What is of particular interest here is that physicians were among the most energetic in this activity.[48] Hundreds of medical biographies changed hands thanks to the support and encouragement of Dissenting publishers such as Joseph Johnson;[49] they appeared in popular journals and reviews, largely controlled by liberal Dissenters, such as the *Monthly Review*, the *Monthly Magazine*, and the *Gentleman's Magazine*,[50] and they were channelled through an active network of medical societies in Britain, on the Continent and in America. Whether they were accounts of famous teachers such as Boerhaave or Cullen or of the honest toiler in a provincial backwater, each helped to promote the professional ideal associated with the new science of medicine. Like the medical ethics, the idealization of a particular medical education and a particular type of character served to unify the developing profession. Biography was the ideal medium for extolling the benefits of an education at Edinburgh, rather than Oxford and Cambridge, and for singing the praises of such exemplary characters as William Cullen, John Fothergill, John Howard and Sir John Pringle. Like medical ethics, medical biography identified and explicated a set of professional norms which could be transmitted and perpetuated. In Britain, as in France, medical biography was practised with particular fervour by those who were excluded from the grand citadel of the established medical profession, the Royal College of Physicians, and they were increasingly of the new self-conscious and sometimes exceedingly smug middle ranks. Most important, however, the new biography helped to establish the role of medicine and its developing institutions in the public, non-political sphere.

The best illustration of the project just outlined is to move from the subject of biography to the biographical subject or Percival himself. In the *Memoirs* of his father, Edward Percival charted the life of a medical 'man of merit'. Short on detail and psychological insight he was nevertheless true to the principles of biography taught by Priestley. Of particular interest is the great emphasis he placed on the public or social connections of intellect. Although the description of his father's medical education is disappointingly sketchy, his account of the opportunities derived from his association with the University of Edinburgh is given great weight. It is against this intricate web of friendship, collegiality and patronage stretching between Warrington and Edinburgh and back again to Manchester and Dissenting England that other developments of Percival's career must now be examined.



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*Edinburgh and Manchester*

In 1761, at the age of twenty-one, Percival like many Dissenters before him left his academy for Edinburgh to enrol at the famous school of medicine. He came well recommended by his Scottish-trained teachers and seemed to have slipped easily into the highest echelons of the city's literary and scientific life. He had, his son notes, 'the good fortune in particular to enjoy frequent and friendly intercourse with the rival candidates for historic fame, Mr. Hume and Dr Robertson'.[51] He came to appreciate that it was impossible to know David Hume 'without admiring his talents and loving him for the suavity of his manners'.[52] When he met Hume again in Paris where the latter was Secretary to the British Embassy, Percival noted 'that Hume alone was insensible to the artifices or the seductions of vanity'.[53] His acquaintance with Hume turned out to be both profitable and disconcerting. Under Hume's patronage the young physician was introduced to many of the leading philosophers of Paris: d'Alembert, Voltaire, Lavoisier, Maupertuis, Diderot, Pinel and other prominent intellectuals, including Mme Necker, wife of the Minister of Finance. According to Percival, Hume's social charms were unfortunately matched by the seductive logic of his critique of revealed religion. He told his son that reading Hume's *Essay on Miracles* had almost shattered his faith but that he had successfully averted tragedy by turning to Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, which remained for him, as for many of his contemporaries, a 'sheet anchor' in the sea of scepticism.[54]

Percival's relations with William Robertson were less dramatic but, as it turned out, more conducive to lasting friendship and those reciprocal favours that oiled the machinery of enlightenment. We are told, for example, that Percival enrolled Robertson in an international project, suggested by the finance minister of France, to form a compact among the maritime states of Europe for the abolition of the slave trade.[55] It was through Robertson, who was Principal of the University, that Joseph Priestley, on the suggestion of Percival, received an honorary doctorate from Edinburgh.[56]

While in Edinburgh, Percival was introduced to an influential patron of Warrington Academy, Lord Willoughby de Parham, then Vice-President of the Royal Society of London. Later, Willoughby proposed Percival's admission to a Fellowship of the Royal Society and, in 1765, he became, according to his son, the youngest member in the Society's history.[57] Percival's fellow students at Edinburgh became life-long friends and colleagues. Thomas



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Butterworth Bayley, a Lancaster magistrate, prison reformer and student of Adam Smith's philosophy, was his most intimate friend and John Haygarth of Chester a close medical colleague.[58] Other Edinburgh graduates with whom he associated and later co-operated in various public health schemes were William Falconer, John Aikin Jr, John Coakley Lettsom, William Currie, John Ferriar and Sir Lucas Pepys.[59] Most were either Dissenters or educated in Dissenting academies and all were well-known medical reformers and men of letters.

Percival did not stay to graduate in Edinburgh but left with several classmates to complete his medical degree in Leyden in 1765. He subsequently submitted a thesis at Leyden, entitled *De Frigore*, for which he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine. After a sojourn in Holland, Paris and then London, to walk the wards of the great hospitals, he returned to Warrington, married, and started a practice. In 1767 he moved to Manchester, set up a new practice and began to write what was to be a steady stream of popular and professional publications on medicine, literature, science, moral philosophy, and pedagogy. He was the founder, with various friends and colleagues, of several important Manchester institutions and played a central role in local political causes on behalf of Dissenters and other groups.

Retrospective accounts of Percival's extra-medical career usually highlight his role in the foundation of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. This began as an informal gathering at Percival's home and was formally instituted in 1781, with Percival serving as its president for twenty-one years. The Society, which still exists, had a great many similarities with the societies in Scottish university towns. During Percival's time it was an eclectic gathering with civil law, medicine, general politics, commerce and the arts among its interests. In its early years it was mainly supported by doctors and thus in effect served the purposes of a provincial medical society.[60]

Connected to the Literary and Philosophical Society was another public institution conceived and founded by Percival and his circle. This was the short-lived College of Arts and Sciences, which was designed to provide a 'liberal and systematic' education for youths destined for a career in business.[61] Percival's life-long involvement with local education also included his efforts, after the close of Warrington, to create a new collegiate institution, Manchester Academy, founded in 1786 for the education of Dissenting ministers. This venture was part of a movement which eventually



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culminated in the Owens College and the University of Manchester.[62]

Along with his role in the formation of the institutions listed above, Percival was also an active participant in two famous contemporary political issues, the Manchester presentation to Parliament of a petition for the abolition of slavery and an application for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. As Edward Percival noted, these concerns were not unrelated as both relied on natural-law arguments drawn from the theories imbibed by the key reformers at Scottish universities and Dissenting academies.[63] Percival corresponded with William Robertson and James Beattie on the slavery issue and persuaded them to send copies of their sermons and essays on the subject to William Wilberforce.[64] These close connections between the Scottish and Dissenting abolitionists and between both these groups and similar ones on the Continent and in America are typical of the breadth and liveliness of the intellectual world in which Percival and his group pursued their profession and exchanged their ideas.

### *Percival's Medical Career*

Like John Gregory, Percival took as his chief intellectual guide and mentor the man he called 'the brightest luminary of science', Francis Bacon. Like Gregory, too, Percival's career can be seen as an attempt to promote the ideals of Bacon's experimental science and to put into practice his proposals for the advancement of medicine. Soon after settling in Manchester, Percival published the first volume of his *Essays, Medical and Experimental*, which was designed to celebrate, promote and illustrate the rules of experimental philosophy.[65] Early in his career he declared that:

> the great Lord Verulam recommends the collecting of facts, observations, and experiments, as the best method of promoting the improvement of physic; and experience hath fully evinced the utility of such a plan. In this way I am ambitious of contributing my mite to the general stock of knowledge; and shall think myself happy, if I can thus render the pursuit of my own instruction and amusement subservient to the interests of my profession, and to the general good of mankind.[66]

Elegant and erudite, Percival's medical essays demonstrate his commitment to Bacon's 'great common world of science' which he contrasted with the closed world of past systematizers and theorists.[67] Like Gregory, Percival celebrated the co-operative and international nature of Baconian science and declared his allegiance



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to a new rational medicine based on the 'analytic-synthetic' method. He believed with Bacon that the best physicians combine the virtues of the dogmatic and empiric or, as Bacon explained, 'being learned incline to the traditions of experience, or being empirics, incline to the methods of learning'.[68]

Many of Percival's medical and experimental essays are attempts to deploy medical science in the battle to improve public health. In one essay he reported the outcome of experiments he and Joseph Priestley had done on 'the medicinal uses of fixed air'; in another he compared observations with Benjamin Franklin on 'the different quantities of rain which fell at different heights over the same spot of ground'. His most successful practical experiment was a series of clinical trials at the Manchester Infirmary to determine the medicinal properties of cod-liver oil. He was one of the first physicians to recommend it as a cure for rickets and is said to have successfully masked its notorious foul taste by suspending it in a solution of liquid soap.[69]

Percival's essays on medically related topics were initially read to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and to the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh. Many were later published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society and in various journals designed for lay readers.[70] His essays were also published in America and translated into French and German. Again it should be noted that Percival's medical writings were promptly and efficiently disseminated by the network of liberal Dissenters, most of whom were in London, by booksellers and publishers, such as Joseph Johnson, and by the group of Dissenting literati, such as the younger John Aikin, who controlled and sustained the leading four or five reviews and magazines in Britain.[71]

If the primary goal of Percival's medical essays was, as his biographer confirms, to spread the Baconian gospel, they were very successful indeed. His scholarly association with several of the most famous men of science in Britain, America and France helped to connect in the public mind the exciting new developments in experimental science with the far less glamorous sphere of practical medicine. Percival was a propagandist for the new science and a skilful medical pedagogue. His devotion to the Baconian ideal and his capacity for attracting a wide audience were therefore arguably as important to the development of medical science and its culture as the successful experiments of more philosophically astute scientists. His real talents did not lie in the field of experimental science as such. This was evident even to his biographer-son who ruefully



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concluded that his father's scientific essays were more Baconian in spirit than execution. His studies on population, hospital polity and public health, on the other hand, were highly regarded and soon became the blueprints for social reforms in Manchester.

For the reforming physicians, who brought with them, from their studies in Edinburgh and on the Continent, the latest views on medicine, duty and the dictates of religion, also emphasized their philanthropic endeavours. The sphere of duty, as Percival explained, was limitless: 'Every advance in knowledge widens its boundaries; every increase of power and wealth multiplies and diversifies the objects of it.'[72] By the end of the eighteenth century a myriad of institutions had emerged as the necessary components of the modern profession of medicine. Philanthropy was central to all of these. Private initiative motivated by charity was the social mechanism which propelled the schools, hospitals, libraries, laboratories and auxiliary health institutions in Britain. The connection between philanthropy and medicine is thus the appropriate context for a discussion of Percival's medical reforms, which constitute a particularly important part of his career.[73]

On his arrival in Manchester, Percival and a group of Edinburgh-trained physicians designed and executed a comprehensive demographic survey of their respective localities. Statistical studies such as these had played an important role in British health reform for nearly a century and, in Percival's time, bills of mortality underwrote the polemics of philanthropy. Because the prevailing populationist economic theory emphasized the correlation between population and wealth, the connection between a numerous and healthy workforce and material prosperity was a powerful incentive to charity. At the same time, the pressure of increased population, greater mobility and the expansion of the economy to industry and manufacture transformed the limited sphere of medical activities. According to Guenter Risse, this led to:

> The so-called medicalization of society [which] allowed physicians not only to reach new sectors of the bourgeoning middle class but for the first time in history to make contact with significant sectors of the populace. The range of health-related activities widened to include greater emphasis on environmental health, infant and maternal welfare, and military and naval medicine, as well as mass treatment of the population in newly erected hospitals and dispensaries. The underlying premise was that sickness could be controlled, removed, and perhaps even prevented by conscious and deliberate application of enlightened views about health and disease.[74]



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Projects such as Percival's were attractive to aspiring physicians who wished to establish their scientific and philanthropic credentials and to enhance their local stature through membership in a larger national and international scientific community. Young physicians were encouraged in their statistical studies by the London Royal Society under the presidency of Sir John Pringle (from 1772 to 1778).[75]

In 1773 Percival and his Manchester colleagues completed an enumeration of Manchester and Salford which he subsequently communicated to the Royal Society under the title *Proposals for Establishing More Accurate and Comprehensive Bills of Mortality in Manchester.* In his later volume of essays he explained that:

> The number of inhabitants and progress of population in the kingdom; the increase or decrease of certain diseases; the comparative healthiness of different situations, climate and seasons; and the influence of particular trades and manufactures on the duration of life, are subjects of the highest importance to the community; and equally interesting to the statesman, the philosopher and the physician.[76]

Percival argued that his bills of mortality would provide politicians with the foundation for calculating life insurance, reversionary payments, annuities for widows and old age pensions. His statistics would provide the moral philosopher data on the correlation between disease, luxury, and intemperance. Citing the low mortality figures in a rural township, he noted, for example, that '*drunkenness* is more destructive to mankind than pleurisies, fevers, or the most malignant distempers'.[77] Like other contemporary physicians, Percival also hoped to test Richard Price's theory that the national debt and irresponsible rulers had brought about a drastic decline in the nation's population.[78] Percival's own statistics demonstrated, *contra* Price, that the Lancashire industrial towns were steadily increasing in size and that industry promoted rather than decreased population. Nevertheless, he agreed with Price that these towns were the 'graves of mankind' and urged his readers to press for immediate legislative reforms to eliminate some of the worst cruelties of the factory system. He was particularly disturbed by child labour and in a report to local magistrates suggested that mill owners would increase rather than decrease their profits if they showed the same consideration for the physical welfare of the children they employed as they did for their horses and cattle.[79]

Percival made efforts to convince local authorities to refuse to



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indenture young apprentices to mills where they were forced to work more than ten hours a day and, as in the other causes he espoused, added philosophical, religious, and medical arguments to his public expressions of contempt. His statistical inquiries enabled him to take a leading part in the public health movement in Manchester which led to the formation of one of Britain's first boards of health and the opening of a fever hospital.[80] In his study of Percival's contribution to the development of medical statistics, E.M. Brockbank points out that Percival was credited by later reformers with an important contribution to the factory movement. 'Alfred', the pseudonymous author of *The History of the Factory Movement*, wrote in this work that Percival's submissions to the Board of Health on the question of factory practices were in themselves a condensation of the evils of the factory system.[81]

Another, less successful project connected with Percival's statistics was initiated together with his friend, Dr Haygarth in Chester. According to their statistics, smallpox epidemics were still the leading cause of death in their communities and, it was then noted, particularly fatal to the poor who did not enjoy the protection of inoculation. Haygarth concluded, and Percival concurred, that the 'intelligent and opulent', whose families were protected by inoculation, had a duty to promote measures to preserve weak and defenceless labourers from a disease to which only they were exposed.[82] With the financial support of a group of philanthropic Dissenters – including Drs Aikin, Fothergill, Currie, Dobson, Falconer and Lettsom – Percival and Haygarth mounted yet another elaborate campaign, to eliminate smallpox in Britain by means of mass inoculation. It has been suggested that the project eventually failed, not because it was too ambitious nor because of Edward Jenner's vaccine, which only appeared two years *after* their project collapsed, but rather because it was run and supported almost exclusively by prominent Dissenters in the troubled years of the French Revolution.[83] Despite the collapse of their own project, Percival and Haygarth helped to promote Jenner's vaccine as a means to eradicate what the latter described as 'the most mortal enemy that ever afflicted mankind'.[84]

### *Thoughts on Hospitals*

Percival's attempt to expand and improve hospital facilities in Manchester met with greater success. This project provided the immediate institutional context for his medical ethics and requires a brief overview. The Manchester Infirmary was part of an ambitious



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charity movement which by the end of the century had created thirty-eight provincial institutions based on the same model and operating under similar rules.[85] The hospitals were privately funded and depended on the unpaid, voluntary services of physicians, surgeons and clergymen. These institutions were specifically designed to provide limited short term care for those of the labouring poor who were not covered by the existing poor-law relief for paupers. Because the primary goal of infirmary care was to assist patients to return as soon as possible to their labours, the great majority of the sick poor, those with chronic, incurable, contagious, including venereal, diseases were not originally considered the proper objects of this charity.

In his study of the Enlightenment hospital, Guenter Risse explains that the duty to assist the working poor was based on an unwritten contract established between the social classes. Since they were willing to work, labourers of all types were considered 'deserving of assistance'.[86] Percival's son, an Anglican clergyman, pronounced at his annual infirmary sermon that 'The wisdom of such charitable foundations can admit of no dispute'. He explained the nature of this 'contract' as follows:

> On the lower classes of our fellow citizens alone we depend for food, for raiment, for the habitations in which we dwell; and for all the convenience and comforts of life. But health is essential for their capacity for labour, and in this labour, I fear, it is too often sacrificed.[87]

Labouring for the rich extracts a great sacrifice on the part of the labourer and, consequently,

> He who at once toils and suffers for our benefit, has a multiplied claim to our support; and to withhold it would be equally chargeable with folly, ingratitude and injustice.[88]

Percival senior, in a discussion of poverty with his son, insisted that the claims of the working poor and the corresponding duties of the rich toward them are based on strict principles of justice. The poor labourer should not only be paid enough to feed and care for himself and his family; the rich also owe him 'compassion in sickness', 'relief in poverty and old age', and 'tender attention to his interests and happiness'. Justice included concern for the spiritual welfare of the worker which the rich were obliged to promote by allowing the former leisure enough 'to avail himself of the privileges of his rational and moral nature, and to work out, through divine assistance, his own salvation'. While a distinction of ranks was



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